## On Sweet on Horne Tooke. A few remarks

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# On Sweet on Horne Tooke – A few remarks

In an article published in a recent issue of the *Bulletin*, Therese Lindström showed that Henry Sweet (1845-1912) makes an interesting case for those who are interested in the history of the treatment of 'grammaticalisation' in Britain. As it appears, the distinguished name giver of our Society made a distinction between 'full words' and 'form words', i.e., between content words and function words, respectively. Lindström (2003: 11) rightly observed that "[s]everal times Sweet mentions that autonomous words can develop into function words – and he claims that this was a generally acknowledged process of change at the end of the nineteenth century, in other words taking no credit for having discovered this himself but instead emphasising that it is generally accepted – a comment which is important for us today in the study of grammaticalisation". To the interested reader who might wish to know when this concept was first introduced into linguistics, I would like to point to some data which could be taken into consideration when writing the history of the phenomenon.

When expatiating on the subject in his *History of Language* (1900) Sweet made a historiographical remark which I will quote in full:

> The older school of philologists regarded form-words as arbitrary inventions made for the express purpose of showing grammatical relations. One of the earliest and most energetic opponents of this view was our countryman Horne Took [sic], whose *Diversions of Purley,* first published about 1770, is an attempt to show that even prepositions and conjunctions once had a definite independent meaning, and are simply worn-down forms of full-words – a view which is now generally accepted. (Sweet 1920: 43 = Lindström 2003: 12)

According to the standard literature, the *Diversions* appeared only in 1786 (cf. Robins 1996: 926). Evidently, nobody seems to have told Henry Sweet that he had been a bit sloppy concerning the year of publication; the phrase "about 1770" can still be found in the last edition of his *History of Language* (1930; cf. Lindström 2003: 12).

More intriguing, however, is Sweet's assertion that "our countryman" was "one of the earliest [...] to show that even prepositions and conjunctions once had a definite independent meaning, and are simply worn-down forms of full-words". This view of John Horne Tooke (1736-1812) as an original theorist, however, had been challenged as early as 1790 in a critique of the first edition of the *Diversions*, viz. in Cassander's *Criticisms on the Diversions of* [15] *Purley*, a booklet written in 1787 and published in 1790 (cf. Funke 1934: 156 n.1; Aarsleff 1967: 61-62 n.37).

Cassander was the pseudonym of the Dutchman Johannes Bruckner (1726-1804), who had been born in the village of Cadzand in Zeeland, one of the provinces of the Dutch Republic. According to the *Album Studiosorum* of Franeker University, he enrolled as Jean Bruckner on 1 November 1742. At Franeker, a small town in the province of Friesland, Bruckner studied theology. He appears to have moved on to Leiden where he obtained a pastorship and where he associated with distinguished scholars such as the classicist Tiberius Hemsterhuis (1685-1766), "the greatest Greek scholar of his time" (Monboddo), and the Orientalist Albert Schultens

(1686-1750).[1] A gifted linguist – it is said that he could deliver a sermon both in Dutch, Latin, French, and English – , Bruckner became the much-esteemed minister of the Walloon or French Church at Norwich in 1753, later also of the local Dutch Church, being the last regular minister of either church.

In his *Criticisms* Bruckner showed himself well-acquainted with the writings of the "very learned [Albert] Schultens" who "endeavours every where to banish from the theory of languages all notions of mystery, all kinds of anomalies [...]" (Cassander 1790: 16-17). Using material from Dutch[2] and Frisian he revealed a number of mistakes in Tooke, who had been "meddling" with words he did not really know – "let me prevail upon you not to be too free with the Dutch", was Bruckner's advice (1790: 74).

A major thrust of Bruckner's attack, however, lies in the denial of the originality of Tooke's thesis concerning prepositions and conjunctions. Bruckner, steeped in Hemsterhusian and Schultensian doctrines, did not hesitate to put it in plain words:

> Professor Schultens was the *first philologist* who suspected prepositions, conjunctions, particles in general to be no more than nouns and verbs, and refused therefore to make separate classes of them, among those that comprehend the parts of speech. But he confined himself in the application of this truth to the learned languages. *You are the first who applied it to those which are called modern*. It would be wrong not to acknowledge, that in this you have rendered the literary world an [16] important service. For though you have not been allowed to proceed far in this career without frequent mistakes, yet your progress through it has been sufficiently marked with success to put others upon making some further discoveries (Bruckner 1790: 78-79; emphasis added).

Tooke was definitely not amused. As he saw it, Bruckner's essay contained many a "willful falsehood". Quoting extensively from Schultens's work Tooke, "a natural rebel" (Robins 1969: 155), sought to invalidate Bruckner's interpretation of Schultens's work (Tooke 1840: 82 sqq., 129 sqq.).

Aarsleff (1967: 61 n.37) concedes that Tooke might well have been influenced by Schultens, although he emphasizes "that the differences are too many to involve simple influence". Without going further into the matter he referred to another author, James Bonar, who maintained[3] that as far as Tooke's derivation of the particles was concerned, Tooke was "not the first who struck into that path, similar views having previously been entertained, though

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[1] The year 1737 saw the publication of Schultens's Hebrew grammar, the *Institutiones ad fundamenta linguae hebraeae*, which brought him European fame. It has been claimed that Schultens's ideas on the relationships between various Semitic languages inspired Sir William Jones (1746-1794) in developing his own views: Jones's "eyes were opened to see a similar relation between the Indo-European languages" (Fellman 1978: 52). I think one can hardly doubt that a scholar of Jones's stature was acquainted with Schultens's works. Moreover, he knew Schultens's grandson very well, for Hendrik Albert Schultens (1749-1793), the third member of the 'Schultens dynasty' and himself an Arabist and Orientalist of note, had studied at Oxford and Cambridge in 1772, and had held a chair at Leiden from 1779 onwards.

[2] Just one salient example: *Betaal* (the imperative of *betalen*, to pay) "is a very common word among the Dutch; it is generally the first word one hears when one lands any where in their country [...]" (Bruckner 1790: 67).

[3] In an article on "Language" in the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*.

probably unknown to him, by the Dutch etymologists Schultens, Hemsterhuis, and Lennep"[4] (cf. Aarsleff 1967: 62 n.37). Although I do not believe that Schultens was really that obscure in England at the time, I will not go into that matter now. The question I would to like conclude with is whether Henry Sweet was enough of a linguistic historiographer to be acquainted with Cassander's criticism, and if so, why he kept a *silentium doctum* with regard to Albert Schultens.

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[4] Note that the classical scholar Johannes Daniel van Lennep (1724-1771) was a fellow-student of Bruckner's at Franeker. It was argued by Samuel Coleridge (1772-1834) that "[a]ll that is true in his [*sc.* Tooke's] book is taken from Lennep, who gave it so much as it was worth, and pretended not to make a system of it" (7 May 1830; Coleridge 1990: 118). Aarsleff (1967: 61) deems this view to be "hardly correct", arguing that "the main statement of van Lennep's doctrine" was published only in 1790 by Everardus Scheidius. However, as I have been able to establish, van Lennep's book on 'analogia' was for sale at Elmsley's in London as early as 1778. See on J.D. van Lennep the paper by G.J. Luhrman (2006).

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